

## **Report from the 40% Competitive Research and Education Policy for Base Funding Committee**

### **Committee Members**

Board Representatives: Paulinus Chigbu (Chair), Carole Engle, Kristine Norosz

NSGO Representatives: Becky Briggs, Joshua Brown, Nikola Garber

SGA Representatives: John Downing (MNSG), Darren Lerner (HISG), Sarah Whitney (PASG)

NSGO Staff Support: Donna Brown

### **Proposed Language:**

**The committee proposes the National Sea Grant Office implement a policy stating 30 to 50 percent of the core omnibus budget (base + merit + match) be directed towards managing rigorous, peer-reviewed research competition(s), as defined by the Sea Grant National Competition Policy, that address stakeholder needs through the creation of new scientific knowledge.**

The National Sea Grant College Program (Sea Grant) has issued guidance and policies about research funding through the allocation policies of 1998, 2003, and 2014; as well as omnibus guidance in 2018 and iterations of the on-site program reviews over the past 20 plus years. During this time, the National Sea Grant Advisory Board also issued reports that included allocation recommendations in 2002, 2009, 2011, and 2013. The policies and guidance, when taken together, have created confusion regarding how programs should reconcile implementation of their directives. Sea Grant needs an updated, clear policy that articulates the implementation and evaluation governing the distribution of research funds within Sea Grant programs.

The high standard of excellence demonstrated by Sea Grant stems from the cohesive integration of rigorous, competitive, peer-reviewed scientific research with hands-on extension and outreach services and the execution of scientific literacy and education programs. Each of these functional elements of the program is important and interwoven with other functional elements.

Implementing a clear policy related to research funding will provide a common currency for program planning and evaluation, and ensure balance among research, extension, and education. Competitively-reviewed research has always been an integral component in the authorization of the National Sea Grant College Program as evidenced by the program's initial placement within the National Science Foundation and current placement within the Oceanic and Atmospheric Research Line Office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. There is a fundamental need for Sea Grant to continue to support and engage in problem solving and innovative, cutting-edge research, while also recognizing the importance and value of Sea Grant's extension and education services.

The proposed policy addresses external, competitively-reviewed research and does not encompass non-competitive research conducted by Sea Grant staff. The committee recognized

the need to develop a policy recommendation focused on the critical role Sea Grant programs play as competitive research funding entities. We recognize that Sea Grant programs engage in research through many different avenues including research conducted by Sea Grant education, extension, and other staff as well as executing externally funded research projects. However, for the purposes of this recommendation and reflecting the manner by which projects are tracked, this policy recommendation is focused on the peer-reviewed, competitive research funded by individual Sea Grant programs via their respective core omnibus budgets.

It is the goal of this committee to support Sea Grant programs in balancing a range of stakeholder needs, while ensuring programs maintain a rigorous, competitively-reviewed, research funding program representative of Sea Grant's strategic focus areas. Through competitive, peer-reviewed research processes, Sea Grant programs support the creation of reliable, new, science-based knowledge to meet stakeholders' needs. Sea Grant integrates scientific knowledge and understanding created at academic institutions to ensure information Sea Grant uses to communicate with local stakeholders is of the highest quality. Through competitively-reviewed research programming, Sea Grant programs serve a critical niche within their states and territories, providing grants for applied, place-based research not often supported by other funding agencies due to the local nature of the research objectives. These grants also provide critical research funding that supports early career scientists and graduate student training, building the nation's scientific capacity and workforce.

The committee provides several recommendations to the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) to both implement and evaluate this policy.

- Sea Grant programs are to direct 30 to 50 percent of their core omnibus budget (base + merit + match) towards managing rigorous, peer-reviewed research competition(s).
- Rigorous, peer-reviewed research competition(s) are to be conducted as described in and conform to the National Sea Grant Competition Policy.
- Each Sea Grant program must demonstrate they are implementing the proposed Policy including achievement of the recommended levels of rigorous, peer-reviewed research competition(s) through their omnibus proposals' budget and scope of work.
- When new funding becomes available, and/or stakeholder needs change within an omnibus award cycle, Directors of Sea Grant programs will work with their NSGO Program Officer to make the necessary changes to their omnibus proposal scope of work and/or strategic plans.
- Should the NSGO issue funds that could potentially become part of future core funding, programs are to be advised of this possibility. Individual programs can then effectively plan to allocate those funds in such a way that future omnibus proposal applications can still meet the recommended levels of rigorous, peer-reviewed research competition(s).

- The NSGO will work with programs during the initial implementation of this policy (the 2024 to 2027 omnibus cycle) to ensure programs can continue to support existing staff while adjusting to meet policy criteria.
- After the initial implementation period, this policy should become part of the evaluative piece of Quadrennial Cycle Evaluations as described in the National Sea Grant College Program’s Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation (PIE) Policy.
  - We recommend that the PIE policy be updated (effective for the 2028 to 2031 strategic planning cycle and thereafter) to state that Sea Grant programs that do not achieve the “30-50% policy” have not met the relevant standards of excellence (e.g. Organization, Relevance, and/or Leadership).
- The formula to calculate the percentage of omnibus funding directed towards managing rigorous, peer-reviewed research competition(s), as described by the National Sea Grant Competition Policy, will be:

$$= \frac{(\textit{Competitive research funds from omnibus [base+merit+match]})}{(\textit{Total omnibus [base+ merit + match]})} \times 100$$

- This policy does not pertain to all research (R/) projects denoted in an omnibus proposal, projects not selected via rigorous, peer-reviewed research competitions are excluded (i.e., in-house research programs or non-competitive R/Program Development awards).
- Program Development funds are to be included in the calculation of omnibus funding directed towards research if such funds are awarded subsequent to a refereed, competitive process following the National Sea Grant Competition Policy.
- At a minimum, this policy should be revisited in six (6) years to assess effectiveness and make relevant changes.